

Eliza Dushku: I worked at CBS. I didn't want to be sexually harassed. I was fired

By Eliza Dushku **December 19, 2018**

The narrative propagated by CBS, actor Michael Weatherly, and writer-producer Glenn Gordon Caron is deceptive and in no way fits with how they treated me on the set of the television show “Bull” and retaliated against me for simply asking to do my job without relentless sexual harassment. This is not a “he-said/she-said” case. Weatherly’s behavior was captured on CBS’s own videotape recordings.

I feel compelled to chronicle what actually happened after The [New York Times](#) published a story about how CBS handled my allegations. I declined to be interviewed for that piece because I wanted to honor the terms of my settlement with the network. I was under the impression that Weatherly and Caron would also not respond per our settlement. Instead, both commented to the Times in what amounted to more deflection, denial, and spin.

Before I get into what actually happened, here is some background. CBS vigorously courted me for several network shows. When presenting the offer to co-lead on “Bull,” CBS made the case to my team that the whole Dr. Jason Bull M.O. of bedding every female interest and winning every case needed strong female balance. CBS said it wanted to pivot to a classic “two-hander” (two main characters), a la “Moonlighting.” After I accepted, the network even brought in Caron, who created “Moonlighting,” as the new showrunner for “Bull.” And so I was hired to finish the last three episodes of season one, with CBS’s expressed intention of my beginning season two as a series regular with an option for up to six seasons.

In explaining his bad behavior, Weatherly, who plays Dr. Bull, claimed I didn’t get his attempt at humor. That’s how a perpetrator rationalizes when he is caught. For the record, I grew up in Boston with three older brothers and have generally been considered a tomboy. I made a name for myself playing a badass vampire slayer turned tough LA cheerleader; I have worked with numerous leading men, including [Robert De Niro](#), [Leonardo DiCaprio](#), even CBS’s own David Boreanaz. I can handle a locker room. I have been on Howard Stern and was hired by Kevin Smith for a film where I wore a black leather cat suit and played a member of an international diamond-thief-gang-

ring. I do not want to hear that I have a “humor deficit” or can’t take a joke. I did not overreact. I took a job and, because I did not want to be harassed, I was fired.

THE HARASSMENT

Weatherly harassed me from early on. The tapes show his offer to take me to his “rape van, filled with all sorts of lubricants and long phallic things.” There was also his constant name-calling; playing provocative songs (like “Barracuda”) on his iPhone when I approached my set marks; and his remark about having a threesome. He made the threesome remark to me about himself and me in a room full of people. Minutes later, a crew member sidled up next to me and, with a smirk, said in a low voice, “I’m with Bull. I wanna have a threesome with you too.” For weeks, Weatherly was recorded making sexual comments, and was recorded mimicking penis jousting with a male costar — this directly on the heels of the “threesome” proposal — and another time referring to me repeatedly as “legs.” He regularly commented on my “ravishing” beauty, following up with audible groans, oohing and aahing. As the tapes show, he liked to boast about his sperm and vasectomy reversals (“I want you to know, Eliza, I have powerful swimmers”). Weatherly had a habit of exaggerated eye-balling and leering at me; once, he leaned into my body and inhaled, smelling me in a dramatic swoon. As was caught on tape, after I flubbed a line, he shouted in my face, “I will take you over my knee and spank you like a little girl.”

One day, when my now husband, Peter Palandjian, visited the set, Weatherly made us all watch as he pretended to urinate on an indoor office plant, then spun around pretending to shake himself off and pull up his zipper. The tapes show Weatherly routinely exclaimed “yellow card” after distasteful remarks. I learned from crew members that, because there had been previous harassment training on “Bull,” Weatherly’s delight in yelling “yellow card” was his way of mocking the very harassment training that was meant to keep him in line.

Weatherly also bragged about his friendship with CBS chief executive Les Moonves. He regaled me with stories about using Moonves’s plane, how they vacationed together, and what great friends they were. Weatherly wielded this special friendship as an amulet and, as I can see now, as a threat.

Weatherly did all this. His conduct was unwelcome and directed at me. Watching the recordings in the settlement process, it is easy to see how uncomfortable, speechless, and frozen he made me feel. For Weatherly’s part,

it looks like a deeply insecure power play, about a need to dominate and demean. In no way was it playful, nor was it joking with two willing participants. It was not “Cary Grant ad-libbed lines,” an incredulous Weatherly excuse which, even if true, asks us to believe that Hollywood behaviors from 70 years ago might be acceptable today. What is hardest to share is the way he made me feel for 10 to 12 hours per day for weeks. This was classic workplace harassment that became workplace bullying. I was made to feel dread nearly all the time I was in his presence. And this dread continues to come up whenever I think of him and that experience.

There was daily undeniably demeaning conduct that is unacceptable in an absolute sense. Everyone should be allowed to work without harassment. Weatherly sexually harassed and bullied me day-in and day-out and would have gotten away with it had he not been caught on tape, and had the CBS lawyers not inadvertently shared the tapes with my counsel, Barbara Robb. Reflecting on the whole ordeal, it often makes me think with sadness of the majority of victims who do not have the benefit of the fortunate evidence — the tapes that I had.

THE RETALIATION

Weatherly never apologized to me. Instead, I was fired shortly after speaking with him.

After weeks of enduring Weatherly’s harassment, I resolved to deal with it directly. I aimed to be my diplomatic best. This was not easy for me, since there were plenty of other things I would like to have said to him. Framing my request as a plea for “help” in setting a different tone on the set, I asked him to “be my ally” and to “help ease the sexualized set comments.” Weatherly responded with, “Eliza, *no one* respects women more than I do,” citing his many sisters and his professed history of being “*too* respectful of women.”

After I left his trailer, I went straight back to my own trailer and wrote down everything I could remember about the conversation in a text to my manager, adding, “I hope he actually received it well & doesn’t run back to the studio telling them to fire me lol.” Then, as I came to learn months later in the settlement process, Weatherly texted CBS Television President David Stapf about 40 minutes after our conversation and asked for what amounted to my being written off the show. Specifically, Weatherly complained that I had a “humor deficit.”

Retaliation is illegal, not to mention unfair and painful. After I addressed it, Weatherly doubled down and ratcheted up his retaliation. Following our conversation and up until the season wrapped weeks later, he barely spoke to me, making it clear he was icing me out. He made every remaining day on the set somehow more awkward and oppressive.

How did it end? With a final act of bullying.

After I addressed matters with Weatherly, he circulated a “memo” to the crew instructing not to comment on my appearance or beauty. I do not know if it was a written memo or a general verbal edict, but everyone called it “the memo.” Weatherly’s message was clear to all: Eliza Dushku was offended by comments on her looks. (For the record, I love a good compliment).

As it turned out, the “memo” was a prop for Weatherly’s final act of retaliation against me. At the wrap party held on the last day of the season, Weatherly insisted that I stay for the champagne toast. It was odd to me for several reasons: Weatherly knew I was sober, and he had not spoken to me this warmly for weeks. Nevertheless, I also wanted to say goodbyes to friends and pay my respects to the crew. Weatherly emceed the toast. So when he called me up in front of the entire cast and crew to pick the winning party raffle tickets, Weatherly was actually going out of his way to humiliate me and said something along the lines of: “I need a *beautiful* woman to come pull this ticket.” He laid it on thick. “A truly *beautiful* woman . . . hmmm, who could that be?” He was performing, pretending to search the room. I immediately clocked what was happening, my breath tightened. “*Eliza!* Yes, the most *beautiful* woman of all. Yes, Eliza, *you* have to come pull the raffle ticket!” he instructed, dripping with sarcasm and in direct violation of his own edict not to comment on my physical appearance. No matter that I’ve acted in more than 30 films and starred in two network series, Weatherly had to let everyone know he was the boss, that he had won and no one would come on that set and reject what he thought should be his unfettered right to do and say whatever he wanted. There are crew members on record as witnesses to corroborate what for me was one of the most cruel, most aggressive humiliations I have ever experienced. It was I who was mortified.

As for Caron, the “Bull” showrunner, he was undaunted to do Weatherly’s bidding. The fact is that Caron wrote me off the show within 48 hours of my complaints about Weatherly. According to what top production brass at CBS told my agent, Caron had gotten rid of me without the knowledge or consent

of that CBS team. Caron personally fired me as I was filming on set one afternoon. It is highly unusual to get fired in the middle of a shooting. I immediately phoned my manager and agent, who in turn phoned the high-ups at CBS. The CBS execs were baffled. They said that they didn't believe that Caron had the authority to fire me this way and suggested that it could not be true. What's more, as was documented in several e-mails and texts, they and the production company, Amblin Television, were reportedly loving my work and called what I was doing for the show "fantastic" and that they "love this dynamic."

My talent representatives spoke to Caron about my firing months later. Caron defended Weatherly, explaining he had simply exhibited "frat" behavior and added, "What does [Eliza] expect, she was in Maxim." On the subject of my legal rights, Caron said to my manager, "If Eliza wants to be out of the business by suing CBS, she can be out of the business."

The boys' club remains in full force at CBS. The bullying continued. In the settlement process, CBS used as defense a photo of me in a bathing suit, pulled from my own Instagram, as if this suggested I deserved or was not offended by the sexual harassment I experienced.

CBS ultimately paid me \$9.5 million earlier this year to settle the allegations — an amount that represented a portion of what I would have earned had I finished my potential six-year contract. But this wasn't just about money; I wanted a culture change. A significant settlement condition was my requirement that CBS designate an individual trained in sexual harassment compliance to monitor Weatherly and the show in general. CBS did not want to do this, but I wouldn't settle without this condition. Another condition I insisted on was that I be allowed to meet with Steven Spielberg, whose Amblin Television coproduces "Bull," so I could talk with him about what occurred on his set. I have not yet had my meeting with Spielberg, but I cannot help but wonder where the legendary Hollywood director was throughout all of this. I have been a lifelong fan and assumed that if anyone could make changes, it would be Spielberg. Watching the Golden Globes and seeing Spielberg front-and-center wearing a "Time's Up" pin shortly after my settlement made me especially eager to meet with him.

The condition CBS required of me was that I not speak about what happened. I really struggled with this and still do. Some online "posters" have called it hush money. Headlines have called it a "[secret settlement.](#)" How was I to get paid? I have worked in this industry for close to 30 years. I faced a wrongful termination, the prospect of a three-to-five year lawsuit, and million-dollar

legal fees for a war with a massive corporation. And where would that war have been fought? According to the fine print in my contract with CBS, I was required to submit to a “confidential” arbitration, where all “proceedings will be closed to the public and confidential, and all records relating thereto will be permanently sealed.” No judge, no jury, and no chance of anyone finding out what really happened (or so they hoped).

In the end, I found uneasy solace in the important conditions I imposed on CBS, and that I would get paid for at least some of my contract. I am still trying to make sense of how this could happen, especially in these times. The last thing I want at this point in my life is to be in the news. I am [recently married](#) and very happily finishing my college degree at home in Boston. But I do feel it is my duty to respond honestly and thoroughly to CBS, Michael Weatherly, and Glenn Gordon Caron’s latest revisionist accounts.

Eliza Dushku is a producer and actress.